close enough to home, far enough away

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/37684609.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Other
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Polar (2019), Hannibal Extended Universe - Fandom
Relationship:	Will Graham/Duncan Vizla | Black Kaiser
Characters:	Will Graham, Duncan Vizla | Black Kaiser, Will Graham's Father, Original Child Character(s)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe, Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Family Feels, Domestic Fluff, past trauma, Genderfluid Character, Genderfluid Will, they/them pronouns, Young Will Graham, young Duncan Vizla, Pregnancy
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Two Loners and a Baby
Stats:	Published: 2022-03-12 Words: 5,892 Chapters: 1/1

close enough to home, far enough away

by transcryptidone

Summary

"He's coming here to see them," Will says. That's supposedly the point of all this; their dad wants the chance to be a good grandpa. But when Will called him to offer a stretch of days when he could visit, they would only discuss the travel details. They'd had reasons for that, but now they don't know why. Now, technically, their dad is expecting to see Apricity -- though he doesn't even know her name -- and he doesn't know that Juniper even exists. At least as far as Will is aware. There's a possibility he could know more the same way he knew where to send the card in the first place.

"That's too bad."

Notes

Written for a November prompt provided by BLARGHMANGOS:

Goodness with the introduction of Juniper and now freaking twins, I would love to read more about your HEU children. No preference in story. Domestic bliss is always nice

So I decided to do more TNTBS :)

There’s a card tucked away in a book on a bookshelf, up high enough that curious, little hands won’t reach for it by accident. Neither Apricity nor Juniper would have much interest generally in a book about fishing and angling, but Will also can never underestimate their kids' curiosity. There have been plenty of near-mishaps when things the kids shouldn’t be interested in and shouldn’t be able to reach still somehow capture their attention and creative ambitions.

But as Will slips the book from the bookshelf, the card is right where they left it. It falls from between the pages and lands in their palm as it has many times since it came in the mail on their birthday. And at first, Will felt resentful that the mood would get soured by an unwelcome card, that the sight of their dad’s scratchy handwriting on the front could snuff out a bit of lightheartedness like Will had blown out the candle Duncan stuck in a stack of waffles. Then they felt scared. Will had tried hard to not let it show, but they kept Apricity and Juniper cuddled in bed with them for as long as they would tolerate.

The card is tucked back in its envelope and Will drags their thumb across the address written on the front. The fear has faded a bit as the lettering seems to fade a little more every time they brush their thumb against it. They almost wish they could go back to believing that their dad forgot all about them, that they’d disappeared onto the open road and their dad would never think to follow their trail.

Their thumb slides next in between where they’d torn the envelope open. The tear was messy and rough, leaving jagged, uneven edges. The card held within gets caught on those rough edges as Will fishes it out. Now, *that.* That felt like a mockery.

There’s a box that’s kept in the closet, not hidden away but saved for another day. Inside, there’s a card from Molly with a tan bulldog on the front that looks just like Rusty and reads *Have a Doggone Fun Birthday*. There’s also a piece of paper with all sorts of scribbles and a child-drawn portrait of their family, including all the dogs and depicting Will’s belly as huge and jutting out from their frame as it feels.

But this card. This card might look like a dog in a party hat with the same simple joy as the other ones but the maelstrom of emotions Will feels looking at it suggests otherwise.

“It won’t bite.”

Will jolts in surprise. The house is quiet with the kids asleep. Will just managed to tuck Juniper in and slip away to the living room. Meanwhile, although Apricity might need a story or two read to her, once she’s asleep, she’s asleep. And so Duncan had some opportunity to step outside and smoke during the time of night best suited to getting lost in thoughts. But though the smell of smoke still clings to him, it seems Duncan didn’t get as lost in the weeds and brambles as Will has.

Will sighs, neither setting aside the card nor opening it any further. Though Will knows what’s written there and can’t quite be surprised by that anymore, they still hesitate to be fully reminded. “Does everything but bite.”

“You can change your mind,” Duncan remarks as he sits down next to Will on the couch. He fills the space differently now than when they first met. He’s always had his presence in one way or another, but at school, he was a shadow too big for his desk. At home, he’s comfortable enough to spread out -- not to mention how the wood delivery business has added bulk and strength to his frame.

“I might,” Will says as they fiddle with the tear Juniper made in the edge of the card when snatching at it with hands that were both excited and clumsy. Will smiles at that memory but sadness and worry cloud what sunshine that brought them. “I’m tempted.”

“What holds you back?” Duncan asks, shifting to sit closer and hunch forward the way Will has been. When he sets his hand on their back, Will feels how sitting this way has made them tense and stiff.

“I don’t know,” they say, rolling their shoulders and wincing at the twinge in their back that hurts in complaint of sitting that way and hurts in complaint when they try to shift and move. “I can’t articulate it.”

Duncan digs his thumb into Will’s shoulder in the way that feels *so good* as he urges, “Try.”

“It’s redundant,” Will dismisses with a groan. “I’ve said it all before.”

Duncan digs his thumb in just a bit more and presses his fingers with the same pressure on the other side. “Say it again.”

Will sighs as they tip their head back and close their eyes. They try to gather their thoughts in some sort of pile, but like dog toys and kid toys alike, their thoughts tend to scatter far and wide and resist organization. But like dogs and kids alike, when Will pulls just one thought out, the rest tumble. “Maybe having a grandparent isn’t important. Maybe they’d be just fine without one. What does it matter? Molly and Wally are family without a proper title.”

“Do you need a dad?”

Will’s eyes are tearing up before they know it. They look away towards the flickering fire, feeling the sting and burn but not from the flames. “I didn’t need him to find a home or get a job or put food on the table,” they say, focusing their eyes on one of the logs as the fire has it crumbling. “I didn’t need a dad to prepare for a baby or raise our children.”

“You needed him,” Duncan states, rasping as quiet as a whisper but stronger. “You just had to make do.”

“I needed you,” Will says, turning towards him and reaching to grab a fistful of his sweatshirt. It’s well-worn and cozy and Will yanks at it to bring him closer. “And I had you.”

Duncan wraps his arm around them and guides them to curl in towards him. He kisses their hair as he murmurs, “You needed him too.”

“It’s just asking for trouble,” Will says with a shake of their head and a wish that they could easily twist and curl in a little better. But there’s been no ease or grace in a while. “I didn’t

want him to know my address. And then I told him he could visit."

"You don't need to be afraid of him," Duncan assures them, like a promise.

In Montana, grandparents can legally request *reasonable* contact with their grandkids. The lawyer Duncan hired assured them that their dad would hardly have a *reasonable* case having tried to sell Apricity in the first place -- and would be reminded of that if any legal threats were made. But all Will can think about is that there isn't any *proof.* They didn't take whatever bogus contract the Andersons were going to present them with. They stormed out of that house without anything more than what clothes they put on for their dad's impromptu car ride.

"He makes me want to run away again," Will says, heart catching in their chest the way it did on a pristine couch in that nice neighborhood. They feel sick like they do anytime they remember the healthy snacks placed in front of them, seemingly with the goal of ensuring Will would be the healthiest incubator to a kid they already saw as theirs. Then there's the crushing feeling in their chest when they think of their dad sat beside them as if any of that should be okay, as if parents aren't meant to think of their kids as worthy of better than that. "But I told him to visit."

"You'll get to say what you've always wanted to say," Duncan reminds them as he has before. That's what he said when Will first considered it and then again when Will was deciding to call. And each time he's said it, it's been a good point. It's with sincerity and close attention that Duncan adds, "Won't just be stuck on repeat in your nightmares."

"What if the kids love him? What if they want to see him? What if he rejects them?" Will says, because though Duncan makes a very good argument for one of Will's worries, they have so many more ready and waiting. And even those worries only scratch the surface; there are some outlandish worries that they still can't quite convince themself are too outlandish to consider. "What if I'm just giving myself more things to have nightmares about?"

"He doesn't have to meet them," Duncan states, reaching for the card Will still holds unopened in their hand. Without looking for even so much as a glance, Duncan tosses the card to land with a soft swish against the surface of the table. "Molly will watch them for as long as we need."

Molly offered to watch the kids all week. Which wouldn't be a first but wouldn't be frequent either. She seems as unsure how to feel about their dad visiting as Will does. They think Molly remembers that she'd tried to defend Will's dad when she first met them. They think she thinks about how many others she might have given the same advice to and had no idea what homes they were coming from.

"He's coming here to see them," Will says. That's supposedly the point of all this; their dad wants the chance to be a good grandpa. But when Will called him to offer a stretch of days when he could visit, they would only discuss the travel details. They'd had reasons for that, but now they don't know why. Now, technically, their dad is expecting to see Apricity -- though he doesn't even know her name -- and he doesn't know that Juniper even exists. At least as far as Will is aware. There's a possibility he could know more the same way he knew where to send the card in the first place.

“That’s too bad.”

Will laughs, the feeling jolting through them just as quick and strong as the surprise had been. The laugh takes what air fits in the space their lungs are given. They uncurl their hand in Duncan’s sweatshirt to instead use their fist to push themself so they can sit more upright. It ends up taking both arms to get them settled more towards the back of the couch.

“Maybe I should have waited,” Will adds to their list of second-guessing. They measure the size of their belly with the reach of their arms like they learned to do back when they were carrying Apricity. Measuring is different with two of them to account for. Will presses their fingers against the surface of the dense swell and wonders just how much more their body has to give and how much they can take. “But once the babies are here I’ll just want it to be us for who knows how long. All the options seem equally *unideal.”*

“It’ll turn out the way it turns out,” Duncan states, rasping and soothing as he places his hand wide and flat against their belly. “Our family will be taken care of no matter what.”

Will shifts their hand to rest over his, feeling the strength and skill that those hands wield. These are the hands that keep an inherited family business thriving. These are the hands that change diapers and hold bottles even when tired down to the bone. These hands caught Apricity when she came rushing into the world and cut the cord when Juniper was born. These hands, like the one who wields them, have truly never let anything bad happen to their family.

“Let’s go to bed,” Duncan suggests, with a rub of his hand against their belly that feels in some way sympathetic to the aches and pains.

Will nods and wraps their arm around his shoulder to welcome his help in getting them upright and standing. They keep hold of Duncan’s fingers as he puts out the fire and as a tether to follow him through the dark. Though Will knows this house with their eyes closed, they can’t say they know exactly where their feet hit the floor and they haven’t for a long while. Following Duncan’s lead, they don’t stub their toes or trip. He brings them to the bathroom and to bed, then helps them scooch towards the middle. And only then does he slip off his backwards cap and yank the sweatshirt over his head. When the mattress shifts, they’re comforted by the reminder of his presence. Duncan holds an expertise in quiet tenderness and Will holds onto that as they let sleep take them.

They have the same nightmare they’ve had before. It never really matters how they get there or why. There’s always an argument and Will never feels understood. Night after night, they plead their case, giving reasons that feel obvious for why they hold so much hurt in their heart still. Tonight, as they plead their case, amongst the yelling and crying that plagues yet another nightmare, they include the nightmares themselves as another piece of evidence that the hurt they have is real.

When Will wakes up in bed in the morning, they groan and grumble. They feel wrung out before the day even really starts. But when they find the bed empty and smell breakfast already underway, they know they’ve been allowed to sleep more than they could have been. Juniper doesn’t wake up as often in the night anymore -- just in time for a new batch of little

ones to wake up at all hours -- and though it must have taken a lot of convincing, Juniper can be awake without Will having to be.

This gives Will just a little more time to stretch this way and that, easing aches that set in overnight and shaking off the way tiredness can have its own ache. Their stretch ends in hunching over and digging their fingers into the corner of their eyes to chip away the sand that's collected there. They wish the chip on their shoulder could be easier to shake off.

Will follows the growling of their stomach and sniff of their nose. There's a trail of maple sweet and salty, sizzling fat that entices them from the edge of their bed. The smells conspire with the hunger that makes itself known in an emptiness that twists and turns in what space hasn't been taken up by the twists and turns of the babies growing inside them. They rub at their belly as the little ones get their morning stretches too, smiling faintly through their wince as they tap their fingers against limbs that stretch out a bit too far.

When they shuffle the short distance to the kitchen with relative ease, they scratch at the hair that got tangled at the back of their head and consider how much farther they will have to walk after the expansion on the house gets done. After Will and Duncan agreed both on a lack of space and a lack of desire to move to suburbia, adding to what they have felt like the most obvious solution to their need for more space. And ever since, Will has had a hard time wrapping their head around the sheer number of possibilities and decisions they can make. Such opportunity and power are still so unfamiliar that it can be dizzying to have them.

"Zazzy!!"

Will scratches their fingers in similar tangled curls at the back of Apricity's head. Just some wiggling of their fingers won't solve the issue and they can feel how much skill and finesse it's going to take to get it all untangled. But for now, Will leaves it be and kisses the top of her head as they greet, "Good morning, Miss Priss."

"Za!"

Will laughs at the sound of the squeal. Z's have been a challenge that Juniper has been determined to master, if only to better make their demands for Will known -- as if they could ever be misconstrued. Juniper flails their arms towards Will, with sticky fingers covered in mush. Will's nose scrunches as they smile and kiss the top of Juni's head too. "Good morning, Perry Berry."

Will gives the top of Juni's head a few more smacking kisses to appease the baby's demands, even if only partially. As soon as Will looks away, Juniper still babbles and flails enough to fling some gloop on the floor for Rusty to snuffle up. Will tips their chin and raises their brow, giving Juniper a look that says *"I see you"* even as they move out of the baby's reach. They walk instead towards where breakfast is stacked up on plates by a skillet that pops and sizzles, a waffle iron that steams, and the one who mans it all.

"Good morning, Daddy," Will says as they pick up a piece of bacon from a pile on one of the many plates on the counter. They take a bite as they watch Duncan keep his head down and attention on the task at hand. Will raises a brow at him just as they had towards Juni, adding a smirk as they ask, "What's this?"

“Waffles,” Duncan states simply as he opens the waffle iron to reveal another pair of beautifully golden brown waffles.

“Special waffles!” Apricity specifies, catching the crucial detail Duncan seemed to overlook.

“I thought so,” Will says, picking up one of those *special waffles* next, the waffles that Duncan learned how to make while watching a baking show they rented from the box across from the store. That baking show was the best way to get Juniper to sleep without Will. There were many times when Will found Duncan lying on the couch with Juniper asleep on his chest with waffles being made on a screen neither watched. The *special waffles* are usually made on *special occasions.* Will hums at the delicious taste and the curiosity. “How lucky we are.”

“Have one!” Apricity insists, picking up her fork to stab another square of waffle that’s been cut up for her. She pops the piece in her mouth and smiles, then promptly returns to the coloring she has set beside her plate.

Maybe it was one too many times eating at the diner by work, but she developed a particular association between eating and coloring of some sort and to the point that she started asking to at home. It was one of many times when Will wasn’t sure exactly what they were supposed to do. They thought that maybe what some would say is that eating is for eating time and coloring for coloring time, but they weren’t sure what made that so important to delineate. They considered that meal time maybe should be family time without distractions, but Apricity sometimes just needs something to keep her occupied for long enough that Will and Duncan can both eat.

“I am,” Will replies, tearing off another piece of waffle and popping it in their mouth. “More than one probably.”

“Ah!” Juniper shouts, extending their arms out as far as they will go and jerking around in their seat enough to risk upending the tray with their mushed waffle and apple sauce.

“Eat what you have and I’ll give you more,” Will tells them and then laughs when Juniper’s sigh in reply is so much like Duncan, just like their hair and the lips they squish together in a frown. The *hum,* the hum Juniper gives as they assess what food they have left is so utterly, truly *Duncan.* And that makes Will’s heart ache in their chest in the way that means something wonderful has happened. It’s a feeling Will has come to associate with this family they’ve made -- and a feeling they hadn’t associated with their dad in a long time.

“Miss Priss?”

“Mhmm,” Apricity says as she keeps her head down and keeps on coloring.

“Can I have a hug?” they ask as Duncan continues to pile waffles higher and higher.

Apricity sets aside her pencil and tips back her head. When her hair doesn’t quite fall away from her face, she tries blowing the strands aside with staccato puffs of air. When *even that* doesn’t work, she finally swipes a hand across her forehead. Then, when all is said and done, she reaches her arms up for a hug.

Though Will's back twinges, they lean forward far enough to be within her reach. As her arms squeeze around their neck, they squeeze back just as hard. It takes restraint to not hold on and cling as hard as they want to. It takes humility -- forced or otherwise -- to not try to gather her in their arms so that they can cling to the memory of when she was just brand new to the world. Recalling that memory, they then recall when she was just barely more than a few cells. Will remembers learning that she existed and wanting to keep her so badly even though they were almost certain it wasn't possible. Each step along the way, she's grown and exceeded all their expectations.

"Thank you, baby," they whisper against her hair before they let her carry on coloring her latest masterpiece -- *materials include paper, crayon, and maple syrup.*

For the rest of the morning, Will tries to shower the kids with just enough attention. Like when Buster had a little bout of separation anxiety, making a big deal out of the impending time apart never helps. It's always best to keep it low key from the time they start getting ready to leave home right up until when they leave the kids behind at Molly's. But as much as they try to keep everything even-tempered, Will has a hard time themself. Will has to try not to think about the fit Juniper throws when they leave them. Molly always says Juniper calms easily enough and keeps her company the rest of the time, but Will doesn't get to see that part. They only see the teary eyes they left behind.

Duncan holds Will's hand on the drive. He doesn't say anything but Will feels as though they're thinking about similar things. Will interlaces their fingers with Duncan's and holds with both hands just to make sure, as they try to not travel too far down pathways that claim to be nostalgia. They could think about sitting next to Duncan driving, feeling as pregnant and huge as they currently *actually are.* They're cramped and their back hurts and they can't quite find a good way to sit. But they can close their eyes if they want to and Duncan will take care of getting them there.

What Will might be most looking forward to with this whole ordeal is for their dad to meet Duncan. Their dad had a lot of things to say about him and they want him to see that none of it was true. They want him to meet Duncan and know without a doubt that any slander he might have spread would simply be lies and projection. Will wants their dad to meet Duncan and know he was *dead wrong.*

When they pull up to the coffee shop, there's another bout of deja vu waiting for them. They'd given their dad the address to a coffee shop in a nearby town big enough to have a motel, close enough to home and far enough away. That's the theme of the day. Will's dad can get close enough to their home in Montana without actually being invited there. The coffee shop they meet at is coincidentally like the one that Will ran to after the last time they saw their dad. It's an easy similarity to have when all the chain coffee shops look roughly the same. This coffee shop sits across the street from a diner like the ones Will and Duncan got meals from on their way across the country and like the one across the street from Molly's shop.

In this coffee shop like so many others, there are tables by the big storefront windows, letting in much welcomed sunshine that's still not quite strong enough to cast too harsh of a glare. Their dad is already sitting at one of the tables by the windows. Will noticed that as soon as

Duncan parked the car but pretended otherwise. Will learned once that even simply sitting comes with a price and so both Will and Duncan get something to drink before sitting down. Will is soon grateful for the excuse when the iced coffee gives them something to fiddle with.

“It’s beautiful out here,” Dad remarks, still looking out the window. The sunlight still has the gray hue that makes it all seem more subdued. Bundled up in puffy coats, the passersby could pass for clouds. “Peaceful.”

“How was your flight?” Duncan asks, straight-forward and perfunctory.

“Good, fine,” Dad says with a nod of his head. His beard has turned gray faster than the hair on top of his head. Lines have collected and deepened around his eyes and his face has rounded out as he’s gained weight. It all tells of time passed since they last saw each other, but he still wears the same clothes as always -- the same plaid, jeans, and canvas jacket like he might have worn when he was in the army. “Hotel’s nice too.”

A silence settles in where small talk loses any fleeting comforts it might have offered, when cookie-cutter pleasantries crumble and leave behind nothing much of substance. It’s the kind of silence that comes from so many things needing to be said and there being no easy pleasantry to ease into such a thing.

Dad looks away from the window and, with another nod of his head, gestures in Will’s direction as he observes, “I see you’re having another.”

“Yeah,” Will says as they resist the urge to pet their hand over the surface of their belly. They wondered when they got dressed if they should try to find a way to minimize just how obvious it is. In this moment, their belly feels like a beacon calling out exactly what estranged them. But even if they’d tried to minimize the shape and swell, only so much could be done at this point.

“You didn’t bring the little one with you,” Dad observes too.

“No,” Will says, bracing themself for the reaction that will ensue. “We didn’t.”

Duncan’s voice is rasping and steady, adding a certainty and strength to his words as he says, “It would be good to do this first part without little eyes and ears.”

Dad sighs, the sound swift and sweeping as a brush off. “Sounds like you’re anticipating a fight.”

Will tries to keep their voice as steady as Duncan’s had been, but they might end up sounding a bit forced as they state: “We have to protect them.”

Silence descends once more; this time not following shallow small talk. Rather, these words cut deep, cut to the core. These are the words that have to be said if they want any of the awkwardness to serve any sort of purpose.

Dad sighs again and covers the top of his mug with his palm. His oil-stained fingers tap against the rim as the last remaining steam rises. “I’m not a bad person.”

“You tried to sell our baby,” Will says, further ensuring there will be no dancing around the point. “And now you want to know her.”

“I’m practical to a fault, I know,” Dad says, grumbling at his own expense. He wraps his hand around the mug through the handle instead and shifts it on the table to rest closer to his chest. “It was the most practical thing to do at the time.”

“If you had gotten what you wanted, you’d never have a chance at knowing her,” Will insists, teeth gritting and jaw clenching as their blood starts to simmer in their veins. “And we don’t owe you *shit.”*

“You’re getting yourself worked up,” Dad states with a frown. “I didn’t come here intending to fight.”

“Did you intend to apologize?” Will questions, the answer to which might bring their blood to a boil in a way that’s been foreshadowed in their nightmares.

Dad goes quiet and looks back towards the window. Just beyond the glass, a family passes by, a perfectly nuclear one. Two parents, two children, bundled up and ready for whatever the day brings them. “Is that what you need me to do?” he questions. “Apologize?”

“You don’t feel that you should,” Will states bitterly.

“I did the only thing I thought I could do,” Dad says, dragging his hand down the scraggly gray hairs of his beard.

“Doing nothing would have been better,” Will snaps, keeping their voice low only so that they won’t be overheard by casual coffee drinkers nearby. “You could have just pretended you didn’t know for *fuck’s sake.”*

“They didn’t tell me he’d be getting so much money,” Dad counters, looking towards Duncan with a shrug of his shoulder in Duncan’s direction too. “Seems like a secret they wanted kept.”

“I didn’t know either,” Will states. “I just trusted him.”

When their dad suggested to them that Duncan might be involved with trading their baby away for cash, Will’s trust in Duncan was what endured. Will’s trust in their partner carried them through relying on promises they had no idea how he could keep. Duncan promised they would keep their baby; they’ve had and kept two and will soon have two more.

“You’ve done well for yourselves,” Dad says, some sort of recognition even if it falls short of an apology. “You have your kid and another on the way.”

Will looks to Duncan as a moment comes when they must decide whether to correct their dad or send him on his way without letting him know anything more about their family. It’s a moment when Will must wrestle with the difference between giving in and giving up. There’s trust in vulnerability, trust that it will be honored and matter. But what influences their

decision most is an imagined future when Juniper questions having been forgotten or made less relevant -- or the twins, for that matter.

“Apricity is our oldest and then Juniper,” Will says, prodding at the tense shape of their belly as they remark, “These two aren’t quite done cooking yet.”

“A big family, then,” Dad observes.

And Will waits and anticipates a comment about getting pregnant young and often. They prepare themself for questions about if they still haven’t learned what to do to prevent such a thing. They expect vitriol and disapproval that will expose old wounds to open air.

“That’s a lot of kids to handle at once,” Dad remarks.

“It will be,” Will says with some portion of a sigh of relief. They even manage to smile a little as they look at Duncan and tease, “They’ll outnumber us.”

“We have help,” Duncan says and though he doesn’t quite smile as Will does, they can still feel the teasing and taunt.

Will laughs as they point out, “They’ll *still* outnumber us.”

Duncan hums like that doesn’t bother him and he picks up his coffee and brings it to his lips with the same casual calm as he does a cigarette. “The more, the merrier.”

This round of silence comes from an ease that suddenly feels out of place, worlds merging where they never had before. Some species are invasive, causing destruction by arriving in an environment where they don’t belong. Will isn’t sure yet if there’s a comparable opposite, if the happiness in their family can extend to include their dad instead of getting trampled on.

“For what it’s worth, I *am* awful glad that you didn’t do what I told you to,” Dad says, eyes glancing between Will and Duncan but not quite making eye contact with either of them. “I meant it when I said I want to be a good grandpa.”

“Apricity and Juniper adore Will,” Duncan states, shifting forward in his seat to brace his elbows against the table top. “Will is everything to them--”

“You are too,” Will interjects. Juniper might cling to Will a bit more, but both of their kids adore Duncan absolutely. He carries them up mountains and around grocery stores. He picks them up when they fall over and inspects any scrapes or bruises to reassure them that they’ll be just fine. Apricity cuddles into her daddy’s chests when she needs a little time for her tears and sniffles to dry up. Duncan’s mac and cheese is a family staple just like his waffles and is asked for on days that need a pick-me-up.

“Being a good grandparent means being a good parent too,” Duncan says.

“Will has always learned everything so quickly,” Dad recalls. He gives his graying beard another brush of his hand as he remarks with some resignation, “I guess I thought there were still certain things I knew better.”

“Our kids don’t learn things the hard way,” Will states firmly. “Not if we can help it.”

Will and Duncan have discussed wanting to make sure that their kids are loved the way they’re meant to be loved and treated accordingly. With patience, with kindness, with a want for them to know they’re supported and never alone. Apricity, Juniper, the twins, and any others if there are any, they’ll know rejection and hurt feelings and misunderstandings as everyone knows and, hopefully, learns from. But, as much as they can account for, Will and Duncan won’t be adding themselves amongst the adversaries or obstacles. And they wouldn’t want to introduce an adversary or obstacle just because he holds the title of *grandpa.*

“There are things I wish I didn’t learn the hard way, that’s for sure,” Dad concedes. “And things I would take back if I could.”

“We’re never going back there,” Will states. They won’t be retracing their steps back. If their dad wants to find his place in their family, he’ll have to be willing to travel more than halfway. Perhaps that’s what Will wanted all along: to know that their dad would endure inconvenience, awkwardness, and discomfort and to know that when opportunities to insult and deride presented themselves, their dad would avoid at least some of whatever hooks and bait might catch his eye.

“I don’t mind coming to you,” Dad says and if Will lets themself notice it, their Dad might seem sincere as he offers, “I’d come back when the little ones come, if that’s alright with you.”

Will takes a deep breath in and out, petting a hand across their belly where babies squirm against a lack of space. They look towards the window but close their eyes as they try to imagine what it might be like to place a newborn in their dad’s arms. There’s an ache with a sharp edge and tears sting at their eyes as they reply, “We’ll see.”

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!